she was, and what she was doing there. Queen sensed his antagonism, and told him that she had been a slave at The Forks, and had come to pay her last respects to her old Massa. The man told her she could stay as long as she behaved her nigger self, but she was to keep away from the family. He walked back to the funeral, and Queen bowed her head and prayed.

"We therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, looking for the general Resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose second coming, in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead."

Queen moved back into the trees and stood with Abner watching as the,family made their way from the graveyard. Sally, supported by the young man she didn't know, walked by, and for just a moment Queen wanted to run to her and hold her and comfort her. But she didn't think Sally would know who she was.

When they were gone, she took Abner to the grave, and said a small prayer for her father. She led her son up the hill to the slave cemetery, and looked for her mother's grave, but could not find it. There were some few mounds in the earth, but no markers, and nothing to indicate that the dead lay here. It didn't matter, Queen thought. Easter was somewhere happier.

They wandered back to the slave quarters, and sat on the grass under an old oak tree. Queen had some sandwiches in her bag, and they made a picnic lunch.

"This is where the slaves used to live," she told Abner. She could feel the ghosts of them now, and marveled at the fortitude with which they had endured their bondage for so many years, with so little hope.

"Was you a slave?" Abner asked her, and Queen nodded, and pointed to the weaving house.

"I was born over yonder." She could not avoid it; she had to go there.

It was abandoned, almost derelict. Dust and cobwebs had claimed it for their own. Abner explored the nooks and crannies, while Queen stood in the middle of the room and won-

dered why this house had ever seemed so important to her.

Then Abner brought her some treasure. A few old cards, handmade and painted, of the alphabet. The dam that had been blocking her memory broke, and she remembered how Cap'n Jack taught her the ABCs from these cards, and Easter's disapproval, and she put them in her purse, and kept them for the rest of her days. She remembered the awfulness of her mother's death, and she remembered hearing Jass tell Easter that she, Queen, was to live in the big house.

She went outside, to free herself of the nightmare that was sneaking into her mind, for the big house reminded her of things she would rather forget, of Lizzie, and of the Henderson store, and of being chased through the woods, and flames, and a burning barn, and more flames, and the body of Abner's father, and she wept a little for what had been.

She held him close to her, and the sun and the daylight eased the grief.

"We gwine go to the big house, Mammy?" Abner asked, for he was anxious to see inside it.

Queen shook her head. There was nothing for her here anymore. Whatever relationship she had with this place was over, buried with Jass.

"No, chile, we're going home," she told Abner.

For home is where you are loved.

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Simon came to her late in life. Another little girl was born to them, Emma, after Annie and Conway, but Emma died when she was three. She had been playing on the kitchen floor, and drank some lye, while Queen was hanging washing on

the line. She died in great pain, and Queen blamed herself for what had happened, and for a while they worried for her mental state, but then she became pregnant again.

She had thought her childbearing days were over, and she

believed Simon to be a gift from God, to take Abner's place, for recently he had demanded his right to his own life, and had left home. Abner had grown into a handsome, strapping young man, with a young man's energy. He worked hard and well on the farm, but he pined for a wider world, for adventure, and he heard the siren song of the big city.

He tried to explain it to his mother. "I'm twenty-one, an' all I ever seen of the world is Savannah. I wants to know what the rest is like."

But his mother would not listen. He was still her baby. She had to protect him from the cruel world.

"What you going to do, end up in a gutter like half the other nigger boys up North?"

He grumbled because he didn't want to go far, only to Memphis, and only for a year or two, to see what it was like, and he wouldn't end up in a gutter, he'd get a job.

"Ain't much call for sharecroppers in Memphis," Queen snapped.

"I's going, Ma," he insisted. "No matter what you say,"

She tried to get Alec to talk some sense into him, but he listened to what Abner had to say, and nodded as if in agreement.

"All my life, I's done what other people tol' me," he explained. "You an'

Ma, and ev'ryone. Nobody ever done ask me if I wanted to be a farmhand, I jus' did it, coz I was tol'."

Alec accepted that, and it made Queen increasingly nervous.

“All right. I’ll ask you now,” Alec said. “What do you want to do?”

Abner didn’t know, but he wanted to be more than what he was, doing the same thing day in, day out, coming home every night with cotton tufts in his hair, going to the same places, seeing the same people.

“I don’t want to end up with my guts busted from throwin’ cotton bales, and never knowin’ what else was out there.”

He looked at his mother, who was fiddling with her dress.

“It don’t mean I don’t love you, Ma,” he said softly.

Alec didn’t want him to go to nothing, and it was agreed he could visit Memphis on weekends and look for employment. If he found a job, he could take it, with Alec’s blessing.

“No!” Queen shouted. They looked at her in surprise. She

was snatching cookies from the table, and stuffing them into her pocket.

“You don’t listen to him on this,” she told Abner. “He ain’t your real pa. You listen to me!”

She stopped in horror, appalled by what she had said. She pleaded with Alec to forgive her, but he was bitterly hurt. He got up and left the shack. He sat in his old rocking chair, puffing on his pipe, furious with Queen, for he had never done less than his best by Abner. To his surprise, Abner came and sat with him, on the step. He wasn’t quite sure what to say. Nor was Abner.

“She didn’t mean it, Pa,” Abner said eventually. “She’s upset, coz of me.

-

“I know it,” Alec agreed.

“I won’t go if’n it’s gwine cause trouble,” Abner said, and he meant it, Alec knew, but it cost him dear.

“You go, if’n you want,” Alec said. “If’n you c’n find a job. You cain’t live yo’ life tied to yo’ mammy’s apron strings. She gotta let go, one day. -

In the kitchen, Queen tried to do the dishes, but she was bitterly disappointed in herself for what she had so unfairly said to Alec, and she was terrified for Abner, who had so nearly been taken from her by fire when he was little. Those fire demons crept up on her, and burned themselves into her mind. She went out into the night, to be free of them, but no matter where she went, she could not find peace.

They found her two hours later down by the river, wandering up and down the bank, clutching at her skirts, and crying out.

“They’re after me,” she cried, for all she could see was flame. They took her home and Alec fetched the, doctor, who recommended care and rest, and constant attention. He walked outside with Alec, and suggested that if she was not better in a few days, he might want to consider having her put in an institution for a while, for examination.

Alec was appalled. “She ain’t mad!” he insisted. “She jus’ a Fil bothered about her boy.”

He paid the doctor and went back into the shack. He sat with Queen, holding her hand, and stroking her forehead. He slept beside her at night, and stayed with her in the day. He

fed her and washed her and changed her, and slowly the fire eased in her mind. Abner did not mention leaving while she was ill, but he went to Memphis on his weekends, and eventually found a job that suited him, in the cattle yards. He did not know how he was going to tell his mother.

To everyone’s surprise, Queen accepted Abner’s news well. Her brush with her demons had frightened her, and by now she knew she was pregnant with Simon. She took it as a sign that she should let Abner go, and in any case was persuaded that his going was inevitable. She kissed him sweetly, and wished him Godspeed.

“Wherever you go, whatever you do,” she told him on his last night with her, “if you don’t find what you’re looking for, or if you got troubles, or if you lonely and cain’t manage no more, remember no matter how far you’ve traveled, it ain’t such a long road home.”

He kissed her, and told her he would not forget, but she was not happy.

Yet as she had hoped, her last-born son healed the rent in her heart caused by her first. Simon was a blithe and serious child, light-skinned, and with a gentle, caring manner. He was also a quick study, and by the time he was four he knew his ABCs. Queen taught him, using Cap’n Jack’s old cards and others she made herself in place of those that were missing. When he was five, she delivered him to school and felt a pang of loss, but it was not as sharp as that caused by Abner. Simon did well at school, and was his teacher’s delight. By the time he was in sixth grade, the teacher had developed an ambition for Simon that she knew was unrealistic, but she could not bear to see his mind go to waste. She went to see Queen, and said she wanted Simon to stay on at school, until eighth grade, at least. Queen was all in favor of it, but had learned something from her experience with Abner. She spoke to Simon, to find out what he really wanted to do, before tackling the man who had the final decision.

“No,” Alec said. And to make sure Queen understood, he said it again. “No!”

“I heard you the first time,” Queen said calmly, sucking on her empty pipe.

They rocked their chairs in the peace of the night.

“He’s leavin’ school,” Alec said firmly. “That’s what boys do in these parts. I need him on the land.”

It wasn’t true. George was married and had a few acres of his own, but Freeland and Conway were all the help Alec needed, and Simon had never been much use in any practical sense, on the farm. Still, Alec couldn’t imagine an alternative career for him.

“You hear me?” He was angry now.

“I hear you.” Queen nodded calmly. “Cain’t believe what I’m hearing, though.”

Alec sighed. He knew he was in for a hard time.

“Dadgummit!” he muttered.

Queen had her arguments beautifully marshaled, and went through them point by point. She wondered what they had worked so hard for all these years. They’d built the farm up to a hundred and fifty acres, and didn’t need any more. They weren’t rich, but they surely weren’t wondering where their next meal was coming from. It had been hard, and she and the children had worked hard, and Alec, but it had been good because she thought it had been for a purpose. Now she wondered what it had all been for.

“It’s been fo’ us,” Alec said, “an’ fo’ our children. So they’d have a better day to look forward to than we did.”

“That’s what I thought,” Queen agreed. “Obviously, I was wrong.

Alec said “Dadgummit” again, but more softly, knowing she wasn’t done.

She wanted to know where the better day was for Simon. He worked hard, as hard as any of them, was in sixth grade while most boys of his age, black or white, were in fifth, and now he had to throw it all away because his pappy was so pigheaded he saw only a life on a farm for a boy, no matter whether the boy was suited for that life or not. Did he want the same thing to happen to Simon as had happened to Abner, so frustrated with life in this narrow community he left it rather than stay?

“I thought you were more of a man than that,” she said. “I thought you were somebody who could afford to waste a boy, just one, and let him follow his own star. Obviously, I was wrong. Obviously I’ve been working my po’ fingers to the bone all these years for no reason.”

She stopped talking and lapsed into aggrieved silence. Alec didn’t speak for a while, but something she had said had amused him.

“Wastin’ a boy?”

Queen knew she had won.

“if schooling’s a waste of time, that-s what it would be.”

Alec was tickled pink by the idea of “wasting” a son, and surely he could afford it. He owned a hundred acres of good bottomland now, and two other small farms, of five acres each, one of which he rented to George.

“Wastin’ a boy,” he chuckled again.

Queen nodded, but was sly, and didn’t let him see her smile.

“Ain’t too many men in the district can afford to do that.”

They sat in silence again, and puffed on their pipes and rocked on their chairs, and then Alec delivered his ultimatum.

“But I ain’t payin’ fo’ all the books he’ll need,” he announced. “Those books cost me a fortune.”

They rocked together.

“Uh-huh,” said Queen.

Inside the house, Simon, who had been listening through the open window,

did a little silent sock hop of joy.

He got work to pay for his books. He did odd jobs at the Cherry mansion. He was a delivery boy for the general merchant, he tended gardens, he chopped wood in the winter and sold lemonade in the summer. Queen thought that he did all this with his nose in a book at the same time, for his grades were excellent, and even Alec was impressed by Simon's industry. He took great pride in telling his friends on the ferry that he was "wasting" a son, until a few of them, thinking he must be wealthy, started asking him for small loans.

On a warm Saturday in late spring, Queen was alone in the shack, and decided it needed a thorough cleaning. Alec was running the ferry; Conway and Freeland were working the land. Simon was selling homemade lemonade, somewhere down the road. She dragged the rugs outside, threw them over the line, and as she beat them, she plotted what she would say to Alec when she had to persuade him that Simon should go on past eighth grade, for she, Simon, and his teacher were determined that he should.

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She saw Simon coming up the path and was surprised.

"You sold all that lemonade already?" she asked him. He didn't reply. His expression was forlorn, and he had a bloody handkerchief to his nose; She dragged the truth out of him, although he was reluctant, for it was his own battle. Some boys, bigger than he, poor white trash, had offered to buy his lemonade, drunkit, and then refused to pay. There was a fight, and Simon got the worst of it.

A spark of fire exploded in Queen's mind. She dragged him, unwillingly, to the poor-white part of town, and found one of the boys who had beaten up Simon. She demanded payment for the lemonade, but he jeered at her, told her she was a nigger fool, and it had nothing to do with him.

So Queen hit him, slapped his face hard. The boy yelled and called for his pa, but it was his ma who came out to deal with the crazy nigger woman who was hitting white boys. Others gathered to watch the fun, and Queen, who was becoming hysterical, stood her ground and demanded payment for the lemonade. A sheriff arrived and tried to make the peace, but Queen would have none of it. To try to shut her up, the sheriff threw some coins at her from his own pocket, but she smashed them to the ground.

“I don’t want yo’ charity,” she cried. “I want what’s rightfully mine.

You think I’m some po’ nigger you can beat up on and cheat and lie to?”

She hoicked up her skirts, to show her leg.

“I is white, you hear me? Whiter than most of you!” She pointed at the bystanders, who were amused by her, or angered by her. The fires raged in her head, and she danced across the border of insanity, into the country of the mad. She raved at them, a long, rambling speech of her grievances, but she kept coming back to her central point.

“I don’t want yo’ damn white charity. All I want is what’s mine! What is due to me!”

Suddenly, she stopped, her body rigid. It was as though suddenly she had stepped outside of herself, and saw what was happening to her.

“For God’s sake, give her the money,” the sheriff said to the boy’s mother in the silence that followed. “The woman’s mad. “

Simon, who had been ashamed of his mother’s behavior, and concerned for her, sprang to her defense.

“She ain’t mad!” he shouted at the sheriff. “She just suffered, is all. We don’t want your money. We got money.”

He turned to his mother and took her gently by the hand. “Come on, Ma,” he said gently. “Let’s go home.”

He led her away, and the crowd parted for them in silence, although he heard at least one snicker about damn crazy niggers.

Queen stared at the empty fireplace. The flames in her mind were quiet again, and had been replaced by an awful fear. Alec sat with her, holding her hand, trying to bring her back from whatever awful place she had gone to.

“I’m here,” he said, again and again. “Ain’t nuttin’ fo’ you to be afraid of. I’ll always be here.”

She shivered. “I so scared,” she whimpered.

Alec would have given everything he owned to know what it was that frightened her so, but he had to give nothing, because she told him.

“I scared of me,” she whispered.

Perhaps that is why he protested only mildly when Queen told him that Simon wanted to continue his education. Or perhaps he had seen it coming. Or perhaps he was just getting old.

“Nigger boy goin’ to high school,” he scoffed. “I ain’t never heard the like.”

Simon had been accepted by Lane Institute, in Jackson, sixty miles away.

Queen was so proud of him. “If that’s your final words on the subject-” she began, but he was ready for her.

“That’s my final word!” He didn’t give her a chance to finish, but it wasn’t the last of it.

They sucked their pipes.

“He cain’t go,” Alec roared, infuriated by the silence.

“Uh-huh,” Queen said.

Simon would go. He had to go. It had become her dearest dream. They had been slaves, and now they were free, but in many ways they still thought like slaves. They had done well with their lives, but they still accepted a subsidiary place in society, and that was how it would always be, unless they

changed their thinking. But, oh, there was more, there had to be more. The words of Davis rang in her ears, like a clarion call. They had to start taking what they could get, not simply accepting what they thought they were allowed to have. She wouldn't do it in her life, and Alec wouldn't do it; they were old now, but the young, they could do it, if they were given the chance, and the key to that chance was education. She thought of Cap'n Jack, and his dreams. To live in freedom was not just a basic right, it was also a precious gift that should be appreciated and nurtured. It had been denied them for so long that not to take every possible advantage of it was immoral.

But she knew her man. It was not fair to push him, who was so generous, further than he could go.

"Uh-huh," she said again.

Alec wished she would argue at least, so that he could lose his temper, and then it would all be over. Perhaps. But she wouldn't even discuss it.

"Uh-huh- was all she would say to any argument he put forward.

"Dadgummit," he muttered.

Simon was on tenterhooks about Alec's decision, but Queen had no good news for him. He turned his face to the wall.

11 'Tain't fair, Mammy," he said. "I can do it. I know I can."

He was filled with selfpity, but there was something more to his distress, for he had a young man's dreams, a young man's zeal, and a young man's belief

that he could change the world, and make life better for his people. He watched his father's friends work the land, using the old ways, the ways they had learned from their fathers, and their fathers' fathers before them, resisting change, resisting new ideas. But there were new ideas, and new ways to farm, and better ways to raise crops and make the farms more productive. Black folk wouldn't do any of these things unless the white folk did them first. Surely it was not enough to take only what the white folk were prepared to give? They had to start leaming for themselves, finding their own ideas, their own solutions. And maybe one day, they would start teaching the white folk, in return.

- 'Tain't fair," he said again.

"I know, boy, I know." Queen stroked his hair. "And it ain't over yet."

It took Alec a week to change his mind. He talked about it with some of his friends on the ferryboat, and while none of them had ever heard of a nigger boy going to high school, they were all impressed that Simon had the chance.

He talked about it with his other children, with Minnie and Julie, who were married and starting families of their own, and they thought he was being an old stickin-the-mud.

He talked about it with Freeland, who had hated school, but was right proud of Simon, and thought he'd be useless on the farm anyway-his head was always stuck in some book.

He talked about it with George, who thought it was a fantastic opportunity.

George had no leaming, but admired those who did.

He didn't talk about it with Mr. Cherry when they went fishing, because he wasn't sure that Mr. Cherry would be on his side, but he couldn't get the matter off his mind, and the fish weren't biting.

“Dadgummit,” Alec muttered in frustration. “I must be gettin’ old.”

Mr. Cherry knew exactly what the matter was. Dora had seen to that.

“Yes, you are,” he said. “Old and crotchety, and you’ve no idea what the modem world is coming to. I feel the same way.

He bided his time, because he knew it was a momentous decision for Alec.

“Black boy going to high school,” Mr. Cherry said. “I never heard the like.

It’ll be college next.”

The words struck home to Alec. He hadn’t thought that far ahead, but it was obvious once it was said.

“But then again,” Mr. Cherry added, “if he can do itwhy not?”

Alec had no argument against that.

“Dadgummit,” he said.

He called Simon to him, but would not let Queen be present. She sat outside on her rocker, and heard every word through the open window.

Alec wasn’t sure where to start. He adopted what he hoped was his most commanding presence, and made a little speech

about Simon being way past the age when he should be working, and he wasn’t working and he should be.

11 Yes, Pa,” Simon said dutifully, with no idea where it was going.

“You’d pro’bly be useless on the farm anyway, with your head always stuck in a book,” Alec continued, finding his stride, and Simon dared to hope.

“But we gotta do somethin’ with you, so I’m sendin’ you to high school whether you like it or whether you don’t,” Alec announced, as if it was all his idea.

Simon closed his eyes, and breathed a silent prayer of thanks.

“Yes, Pa,” he said, very carefully, anxious not to offend his father, in case he changed his mind. “Thank you, Pa.”

Alec grunted. It was done. For better or worse, it was done. He made a fatherly speech about Simon being young and a long way from home, and not to get into any trouble with girls.

Then he took fifty dollars from his pocket. It was the biggest sum of money Simon had ever seen.

“Only the good Lord knows what this thing is gwine cost,” Alec said, “an’

I ain’t made of money. I’m giving you fifty dollars, an’ that’s it, there ain’t no more. You’ve got this durned scholarship thing, so I ain’t spendin’ one cent more than this fifty dollars. Anythin’ else you need, you’re gwine have to work for it. “

He put the money in a little purse and gave it to his son. Simon could hardly contain his joy, and tears of gratitude sparkled in his eyes.

“I’ll work hard, I promise, Pa,” he swore.

Alec sent him out to tell his mother, and turned away. When he spoke to the empty room, his voice was gruff.

“Most fool thing I ever did.”

Queen was puffing on her pipe, rocking in her chair, when Simon came out to her, a grin as big as Texas on his face.

“Oh, thank you, Ma!” he said.

“Nothing to do with me,” she said. “I don’t approve. You’re too young to be so far away from home.”

Simon was puzzled. He had thought she would be pleased.

“Why should I be pleased?” Queen demanded, trying to blink away the tears.

“My little boy going off alone in the world, and only the good Lord knows what evils are lurking out there to snare you.”

But she lost the battle, and the tears ran.

“Of course I’m pleased; you think I’m touched in the head?” She held out her arms to him, and he moved into her embrace. She clung to him for a moment, then sent him on his way to tell his friends.

“And don’t be late home,” she warned, wiping her eyes with her hankie. “I ain’t got long with you.”

“No, maam,” he laughed, and ran off into the night. Just before he disappeared into the shadows, he leaped high in the air, and let out a great whoop of joy. Then he was gone, and there was silence.

Alec came out and sat in his rocker, beside his wife. They puffed on their pipes and looked at the stars.

And there was silence.

Alec drove them in the buggy to the little train depot at Sarsparilla, seven miles down the road. Simon was bursting with excitement and nervousness. He was very smart in his freshly pressed suit, but Queen thought he looked far too young to be setting off on such an adventure. There were several people waiting for the train, and as it chugged toward the depot, the white flagman waved it down.

Simon had never seen a train before, and it thrilled him, and gave him the sense that now, truly and at last, he was on his way.

He offered to shake Alec's hand, but to his surprise, his father embraced and hugged him hard, and wished him well. Then Simon turned to his mother.

She straightened his collar and tidied his hair, and said little private things of love to him, and then it was time to go. He pulled away, as choked up as she.

He climbed into the packed Jim Crow car with the other blacks, and a red-capped porter helped him aboard. He felt so grown-up, and proud, and he felt a brief rush of anger that he could not sit in the other cars, with the whites. But his transcending emotion was joy at his bright adventure, and the great days of his future that lay ahead.

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Queen couldn't bear to see him sitting there with all those grown-ups, and she almost changed her mind.

"He cain't, he's too young," she cried out, but the train whistle drowned her voice, and only Alec heard her, and he put his arm around her.

The train began steaming away. Simon leaned out of the window to wave farewell to his parents, and waved so much and leaned out so far that he nearly fell out. His traveling companions pulled him back in, and laughed at his happiness, for it was infectious.

The train chugged away, and Queen watched it go until it was lost to the horizon, and only a column of smoke suggested where it had been.

They rode home in the buggy against a lowering sky, for rain was in the air. They both felt a sense of loss, for this, the last of their children, had left home, and now all they had was each other.

"You'll miss him," Alec said, knowing he would too.

“Uh-huh.” Queen nodded. She reached out to her husband and took his hand, in a simple gesture that might, she hoped, let him know how very much she loved him, and appreciated him.

“Just have to make do with you, won’t l?” she said.

90

He couldn’t fail. It wasn’t possible for him to fail. It wasn’t fair of God to let him fail.

Queen’s hands were shaking. She was in the kitchen trying to prepare a meal, using the simple domesticity to calm herself down, to come to terms with the news about her boy.

For Simon was failing. He had scraped through Lane Institute by the skin of his teeth. To a large extent, this was because of his financial situation. In order to pay his way, he had taken a multitude of part-time jobs. He waited tables in the student

dining room and helped at a home for wayward boys. He worked in a greenhouse. In the winter he persuaded four white homeowners to pay him a dollar a week each to come into their homes at dawn and build fires for them, so that they might wake up to a warm house. He was almost permanently tired and often fell asleep as he was eating his meals. He became the butt of student jokes, although there was one girl, a pretty dark teenager, Bertha Palmer, who was kind to him. Their friendship ripened and developed, and was a blessing to Simon, for Bertha was a ray of sunlight on his otherwise clouded horizon.

He had almost no time to study. His grades in English and agriculture were

good, but low in every other subject. At the end of twelfth grade, his average was just good enough for him to transfer to A & T College in Greensboro, North Carolina. There he had to reconstruct his exhausting work schedule, and his studies suffered. He survived his freshman year, but in his last sophomore semester the professor of a course for which he couldn't afford the books told him he was going to fail him. It was almost a relief to Simon, for he didn't have the energy left to fight. He had applied for a summer job with the Pullman company as a porter, and when he received a letter informing him that he had been accepted, he made his decision. He would work on the train for the summer, save enough money to buy a mule and plow, and go home to Savannah, his tail between his legs, to work the land.

Much as Queen longed to have her son home with, her, her heart bled for his distress and his thwarted dreams, and for the sense of failure that, in his letter to her explaining his decision, was almost palpable.

Queen's mind ran like glycerin. There had to be some way she could help him. She was sure it was not a question of his ability, only of his circumstances, and if those circumstances could be changed, he would triumph yet. They had a little money; they could give him an allowance, but she doubted her ability to persuade Alec, or even Simon, to see the wisdom of that. Both men, father and son, were stubborn, and even if Alec gave, would Simon accept? In any case, she had to face the reality, that his professor was going to fail him. There was nothing she could do about that.

She felt old and tired, for the battle had been long, and instead of victory, she was staring at defeat. She opened the door of the stove to put more wood in, and the flames danced and sparked. She stared at the flames and they ate into her mind, burning her brain, bringing back awful memories she hoped she had forgotten.

She saw the fiery brands of men chasing her through the woods, and a burning bam, and a woman on fire screaming as she tried to escape. She saw a burning cross, and the buming body of a man she had loved. She turned abruptly away

from the fire, as if to block the flames from her mind, but knocked against a pan on the stove, with hot fat in it. The fat caught fire and she grabbed the pan, to move it to the sink, but some of the flaming fat spilled on her dress, and her skirt began to bum.

Hysterically, she beat at the flames, but could not get them out.

She had escaped from it all these years, but now the fire had caught her at last.

Screaming for help, she ran from the shack and threw herself to the ground, rolling over and over in the dirt to try to douse the flames.

All the passengers on the ferry knew that Alec was in a bad mood, but could not work out why. He grunted when spoken to, complained if he had to give change for the fares, and would not tell anyone his problem. Fred, who was on the ferry, tried to get a spark out of his old sparring partner.

"How's that boy of vour'n doin'?" he asked innocently, for surely Alec was proud of Simon. Everyone else in Savannah was. To his surprise, Alec gave only a minimal response.

"Fine," he muttered. "Jus' fine."

If Fred had been more aware of Simon's true circumstances, he might have dropped the subject, and let Alec simmer in his own dilemma for a while, but Fred couldn't do that, because he didn't know.

"We's all mighty proud of him," he continued, rushing in like an angel intent on healing. "Ev'ry nigger in Savannah's gwine have a party the day he graduate."

It was true. Simon represented a bright ray of hope for the

future to this community of sharecropping ex-slaves, for whom life was hard.

But Alec would not be cheered.

“All them niggers best not count their chickens,” he grunted. He was surprised that he was so depressed by Simon’s failure. Having resisted, so obstinately, the plans for Simon’s higher education, he had become, faced with the fact, extraordinarily proud of his son. Now it had all come to nothing, as Alec had predicted it would, but he found no pleasure in being proved right. He was grumpy and miserable, but could not blame the boy for he had already achieved so much more than Alec had ever imagined possible.

He cursed himself for not giving the boy a proper allowance, and swore that somehow he would make amends to his son, but he could not think of anything that would mend a broken dream. The knowledge that the dream was collective, and shared by so many more than those directly involved, depressed him even more.

He guided the ferry to the southern landing stage, anq saw Minnie running down the hill, shouting at him.

“Pappy!” Minnie cried. “Ma’s run off, and she cain’t be found! “

Alec guessed immediately what had happened, and why, for there was a history of it, and he cursed himself again for not realizing that Queen would have taken the news about Simon so hard.

Minnie had come to visit.Queen that afternoon, as she did two or three times a week, to bring preserves and spend a pleasant time chatting about the world, and the difficulty of raising a family, and seeking advice about those difficulties. She went into the shack without knocking, and knew that it was empty. She called out for Queen and went into the kitchen. She saw the pan lying on the floor, and the charred patches of wood where the flames had caught and died, and began to worry. She looked all through the shack and the shed, and searched the surrounding property, but there was no sign of Queen. She went to the mansion and alerted the gardeners, but they had not seen her, nor had Dora. Like Alec, Minnie guessed that there had been a crisis, and ran down to the wharf to tell her father.

Word quickly spread, and all the family gathered to join in

the search for Queen. The gardeners from the mansion helped, and several of the passengers from the ferry, and other farmers and their sons, for Queen and Alec were well known and respected. They scoured the fields, and sought through the bushes on the riverbank. They looked in barns and outbuildings, and asked everyone they met, but no one had seen Queen.

At evening they lighted torches to continue the hunt, and the night air echoed with the sound of her name being called.

There was no sign of her.

Alec came home at midnight. He was weary and worried, but there was no point in looking anymore until daylight. Julie had come to keep Minnie company, and they had cooked a meal for the searchers. When Alec came in, they looked at him hopefully, but he shook his head. They sat him down and fussed over him, and told him to eat, but he could not, knowing Queen was out there somewhere, hungry and alone.

He fell to his knees and prayed that she be safe. He was not an overly devout man-he believed in God in a general way, not as an active participant in their lives-but he had no one else to turn to. When God did not answer his prayer the next day, he became bitter, and despaired for his wife. He sat in his rocking chair that night and would not go to bed. He hoped, against all common sense, that in a little while he would see her walking along the path toward him, and she would come to him, and sit in her rocking chair, and puff on her empty pipe, and never go away again. As the night wore on, he could not even bring himself to look at the empty chair beside him, for it reminded him too painfully of what he had lost.

As the steel of dawn edged into the sky, he fell asleep in his chair, still waiting for her to come home.

A couple of miles away, in that same early morning light, a sharecropper and his son made their way down the lane to their few acres, and heard a scrabbling sound in the ditch that edged the fields. They thought it was an animal who had been hurt and went to find it, to put it out of its misery.

It was Queen, covered in mud, brambles stuck in her hair

and her dress, cowering in a hole she had dug with her bare hands. She was muttering, and stared at the sharecropper with vacant eyes. He knew she was the ferryman's woman, and reached out his hand to her, but she backed away from him, frightened, whimpering her fear.

"Fetch yo' ma, boy," the sharecropper told his son. "This be woman's work."

The sharecropper sat near Queen to keep an eye on her, and she seemed to accept his presence, but would not move out of her hole. His wife and two daughters came, and were gentle with Queen, and coaxed her from her hiding place with woman's words, and led her home.

They brought the deranged Queen to Alec, at his shack. He stood on the porch watching her return, with Minnie and Julie, but did not go to her, because she did not seem to know him, or where she was.

"This here's yo' wife," the woman said.

Alec's heart exploded. "She low sick?"

"She touched in the head," the woman said, simply, just as it was, without comment or criticism. Alec moved to Queen and put his arm around her, but she did not seem to know him. He offered food to the woman and her daughters, but she said there was no need.

"I'm right sorry to see her this way."

Alec led Queen to the house, telling her she was safe because she was home, but she did not hear him, nor did she recognize her daughters.

Simon tried to make himself comfortable in the cramped porter's cubbyhole as the train rattled through the night from Buffalo to Pittsburgh. It was two in the morning, and all the passengers in his compartment were tucked into their berths.

Sleeping, Simon thought enviously, which he could not do.

A WIFE AND MOTHER, LOVED 777

He was tired, depressed about his future, and worried about his ma.

He had been writing a letter to Bertha, but the movement of the train jarred his hand, and his writing looked scratchy. Or so he told himself, when really he knew that he could not tell Bertha of his mother's plight, for he was worried she might not understand. Queen had been institutionalized because of her mental breakdown, and to the uncaring mind that equated with mad, and he did not want anyone to think that of his mother. He screwed up the paper and threw it in the bin. He would have to tell Bertha-she had to know-but he would do it tomorrow, when he was thinking clearly. He settled on the stool, his back against the wall and his feet on a shelf so he could rest his head on his knees, and closed his eyes to rest.

He enjoyed his job as a Pullman porter, but he found it difficult to adjust to his nighttime schedule. He spent very little of the money that he earned on himself, and what he had saved from his wages, together with his tips, had given him sufficient money to dream about college again.

He wouldn't have minded his failure if he believed that he did not have the ability to do well, but he was sure his low grades were because of his several part-time jobs, and he was loath to abandon his academic ambitions entirely. He wanted at least the chance to compete on a level field, to see if he was right, and he had begun to wonder if he could go back to A & T for one last semester. The money he had saved meant that he would not have to work for that time, and he would be able to devote all his energy to his education. Then he had received a

letter from his brother Conway, telling him of Queen's plight, and Simon felt his place was in Savannah, with his mother.

He woke suddenly, a few minutes later, to the insistent ringing of the bell. One of his passengers was awake and wanted something. Simon blinked the sleep from his eyes, and pulled himself to his feet. The bell rang again, and it irritated Simon.

"Yes, sub, Massa. I's a-comin', Massa," he muttered angrily at the bell, in fair imitation of slave dialect. "Hold yo' bosses. "

He splashed water on his face, and hurried to answer the summons. He presented a pleasant face to the passenger, an

elderly man in silk pajamas and a fine dressing gown. His wife couldn't sleep, and he wondered if warm milk was possible.

Simon was warming the milk on the stove in the serving cubicle when the passenger appeared in the doorway. The cubbyhole was small, and two was a crowd.

"Something else, sir?" Simon inquired politely, but the passenger shook his head. He was a night owl, and did most of his thinking, and most of his work before his retirement, at night. Now he was wide-awake, and wanted someone to talk to. He kept his voice low, because others were asleep.

Simon didn't know what to talk about, and busied himself with the milk.

"Good job?" the passenger asked him.

… Tain't my dream," Simon shrugged.

The man smiled, and wondered what Simon's dream was. So Simon told him, and told him of his plan to go back to the farm.

The passenger raised his eyebrows. "You don't want to graduate?"

“I wish,” Simon said, shrugging again, and saw no reason not to tell the truth. “My grades are terrible.”

“Ahhh,” said the passenger, and that made Simon mad.

“Ain’t no ‘ahhh’ about it,” he said, rather more sharply than he intended. “I could do it, I know I could, but I never got the time to study. “

He explained something of his circumstances, and the passenger nodded gravely, but his only comment was that it seemed a pity to waste all his hard work.

Simon nodded politely, but seethed inwardly. What could this rich white man know of a young black boy’s problems? Simon was guessing that he was rich, but his dressing gown was luxurious, and his manner courtly.

“Milk’s ready, sir,” he said, to be rid of the man. The passenger took the tray and went back to his wife, but returned a few minutes later as Simon was settling to doze again.

“Soffy,” he said. “I forgot to introduce myself. I’m Mr. Boyce. What’s your name?”

Simon gave his name, and they talked for a while of the world and its problems. The man seemed more interested in Simon’s general knowledge and eventual ambition, rather than

his specific educational achievements. He talked of world events, and of the possibility of war in Europe. The United States would not be involved, but Mr. Boyce wondered how Simon would feel if his country ever did go to war.

“Reckon I’d enlist,” Simon said.

Mr. Boyce nodded and smiled. “Even though your country has not exactly

treated your people well?”

Simon didn’t want to get into an argument about race relations. It was too late and he was too tired.

“Be a sight more exciting than working on the farm,” he said.

Mr. Boyce nodded again. He checked his watch, and apologized for keeping Simon from his duties. He smiled.

“Or your sleep,” he said, and bade Simon good night. Simon settled into his cubbyhole and closed his eyes, but all he could think of was his mother.

On the platform at Pittsburgh the next morning, Mr. Boyce sought Simon out and introduced his wife to him. He thanked Simon for the interesting conversation of the previous night and gave him a five-dollar tip.

“Don’t give up on your dreams too easily,” he said. He and his wife wished Simon well, and went on the way.

Simon put the five dollars in his pocket and finished up his duties. Mr.

Boyce had annoyed him a little but had spurred him as well. As he worked, he came to a decision about his future.

At the end of the summer, he went home for a week to see his family. Alec met him at the depot, and greeted Simon warmly.

“How’s MaT’ Simon asked

“Not too good, boy,” Alec told him. They climbed into the buggy, and as they drove Alec explained what he knew of Queen’s mental state.

“Profoun’ dementia, that’s what they said.” He wasn’t sure he’d got it right. “I think that’s what they said.”

Alec had called a doctor to Queen after her breakdown, and he had recommended she be institutionalized. He did not think Queen was dangerous to

anyone else, but believed that she could do harm to herself.

Alec resisted him strongly, but when

Queen's condition did not improve to any great extent, he put aside his prejudices about mental illness and committed her. He almost changed his mind when he took her to the institution; it was a nightmare place, a house of the mad, and Alec did not want to admit that Queen was mad. The doctors persuaded him that they could help Queen, and, however reluctantly, he agreed to let her stay.

She was getting better, but he hated what they were doing to her. They had some water treatment they used on her, to flush the fire demons out of her, they said, but Alec thought it was something from a manual of torture. They strapped her to a chair and poured a headlong rush of water on her, from above, from a fireman's hose, sometimes for up to half an hour. He couldn't imagine how the frail woman who was his wife could endure it.

But she did seem to be getting better.

"The thing is," he told his son, "I keep wonderin' if'n she's in there coz of me. "

He blamed himself bitterly for Queen's condition, but couldn't see what more he could have done to help her. He visited her as often as he could, and tried to provoke her to health.

"I ain't mad," she said.

Alec was gentle with her, but firm. He had to be firm, for both their sakes.

"You here," he said. "Must be somethin' wrong."

She didn't want to hear that, and turned away.

“I keep wondering what I did wrong,” he said. “I tried to make a good home fo’ us, I tried to be a good husband to you, I tried to be a good pappy to our chillun …”

He remembered her distress when Abner wanted to leave home, and what she had said to him then.

“I think I tried hardest with Abner,” he said, “because he weren’t mine.

He was some part of you I could never reach, and I thought if’n I could reach him, I could reach that part of you. An’ I cain’t work out what I did wrong.”

If there was one, single moment when Queen began to see the light that would guide her back to sanity, it was then. She could not bear to see him castigate himself, for he had done nothing wrong. She reached out to him and touched his hand.

“Not a thing, I promise you,” she whispered. “Not one single thing.”

But he would not relent. In his heart he believed that she would only get better when she wanted to get better, and he had to give her that will.

“I wants you to be well an’ happy,” he said. “But if’n you cain’t be well, I wants you to be happy, an’ if’n you cain’t be happy, I wants you to be well.”

The tiny light that Queen could see in the distance grew stronger. All sons of things that had never made sense before suddenly became clear to her.

She didn’t know how to be happy. No one had ever taught her. As a child she was expected to serve and obey, but no one ever cared about her happiness. She had been happy, briefly, in Decatur, but it was some other she, the white side that the world rejected, and she had lived a lie, so the happiness was a lie. She thought she’d been happy with the sisters in Huntsville, but when Abner was born she realized that the sisters didn’t really care about her at all; they were

using her for their own selfish needs. She tried to be happy with Davis, but he was too concerned with the pain of the world to be able to alleviate hers.

All her life she'd been trying to work out where she belonged, all her life she had tried to fit in with what other people expected her to be, but no one had ever asked her what she wanted. No one had ever asked her if she was happy.

And then she realized that wasn't true. One man had asked her that question.

"I loves you with all my heart,'" Alec said.

And she began to get better.

"She be pleased to see you," Alec said to Simon, as they pulled up outside the institution. "She be better now you home. "

It was the perfect opportunity for Simon to tell his father of his plans, but he could not do it until he had seen his mother. He looked at the ugly building where his mother was incarcerated, and shivered slightly, but his father would not take him inside.

"'Tain't fittin'," he said. "'Tain't a good thing fo' a young man to see.

"

He arranged to have Queen meet her son in the garden. Simon waited patiently under a tree, and tried to avoid looking at the few inmates who were allowed outside to exercise. Their clothes were filthy, and their hair matted, and one of them talked soundlessly to someone only she could see, and another called on Jesus to deliver her. Simon felt pity for them, but could not imagine his mother in the company of these unfortunate souls.

He saw Alec leading Queen to him. Her appearance shocked him, for she seemed so old and frail, and so unlike her old self in this dull garb. He wanted to snatch her up, and take her away from here, and never let her out of his sight, and protect her always. He moved quickly to her, and when she saw him, her eyes lighted up with joy, and she was, for a moment, herself again.

"Oh, Ma," Simon cried.

She hugged him hard, held on to him, and moaned a little with the love of him. Then she told him her secret.

"I ain't mad," she said.

Alec went and talked to the doctors, to discover Queen's progress, and to give her the chance to talk to her son. Queen and Simon walked together in the pretty garden, and he told her things that he thought might make her happy, silly, trivial things, and made her smile, and laugh. Then, carefully, he told her of his plans.

He was going back to A & T, just for one semester. He had money saved from his summer job, and he would not have to do any part-time work to sustain himself. He could devote all his time and attention and energy to his studies. He believed he would get good grades, and wanted to prove to himself that he could. Just for one semester. Then he could come home to the farm, but he could not come back in failure.

It was better than the best Christmas she could remember. It was what she wanted to hear from him, needed to hear from him, and it made her heart sing.

"You can do it," she said, her eyes shining with pride. "It was meant to be."

There was something else to tell her. He wasn't sure if now was the moment, but she was his ma, and she deserved to know. Just as Bertha had deserved to know the truth about

Queen's condition, and he had told her, and she had responded with care, and

Queen's condition, and he had told her, and she had responded with care, and affection, and concern. He had been very wrong to doubt that she would.

"I've met a girl, Ma," he said,

For a moment, he thought he'd done the wrong thing. Queen's eyes narrowed.

"And what's her name?" Queen demanded. "What she call herself, this girl who's stealing my baby away from me?"

"Bertha," Simon said meekly. "Bertha Palmer."

Queen was silent, staring away from him, at something in the distance.

Then Simon realized something odd. She was laughing. She turned to him, and she was laughing.

"Not my baby?" she said, "Not my little baby boy?"

He laughed with her. "Quite a big boy now, Ma," he said.

It wasn't so hard for Queen to let Simon go. She'd had to let go of Abner, and that had pained her, but she had learned from it. And Abner had not tied to her; he still loved her, and was more attentive to her now, from far away, than ever he had been when he was home. So she let go of Simon, and all she prayed for was that he be happy. Because now she understood a simple truth. There was one man who loved her more than anyone else in the world, and to expect more love than that from life is simple greed.

Simon visited her every day for the week he was in Savannah, and on the last day when he went to say goodbye, she hugged him and wished him Godspeed and good luck.

He went back to Greensboro, and settled to his studies. He wrote to Bertha regularly, and gave the good news of his progress, and of his excellent grades. Then one day he was summoned to the president's office. It made him nervous, because he could not imagine what he had done wrong.

But the president was fulsome in praise of his work, and gave him some

extraordinary news. A certain Mr. Boyce had written to ask the cost of one full year's tuition, and then sent a check. It covered everything: tuition, dormitory, meals, and books. Simon was speechless. Why had someone he didn't know done this extraordinary thing? He hardly heard what the president said after that, because all the dark clouds had lifted from his horizon, and in his future he saw nothing but unbounded joy.

When he left the president's office, he walked across the lawn trying to work out who his benefactor was.

Then the penny-or rather, the five dollars-dropped, and he remembered a courtly, elderly man on a train, whose wife couldn't sleep.

He let out a whoop of exultation that shocked the students near him, and leaped several feet into the air.

At about the same time, Alec drove his buggy to the institution to bring Queen home. A nurse escorted her from the forbidding building and delivered her to her husband. Alec put his arms around her, and hugged her hard, then helped her into the buggy. They didn't speak very much on the journey home, because they never spoke very much about the things that were important.

It was a hot and dusty day, and when they got to the shack all was quiet.

Queen stared at the little house, loving it, loving being home.

"Dunno where's the family," Alec wondered. "They said they'd be here, to meet you."

But Queen shook her head.

"It don't matter," she said. "This is all I need."

He helped her down, and held her arm, and took her into the quiet house.

Inside, as if from nowhere, there was a burst of color, and noise, and people. Streamers flew around her, and all her family were there to welcome her. Minnie and Julie with their husbands and children, and Freeland with his wife and sons. George was there, with his family, and Abner, who had tired of city life, and had come home for good.

Queen stood among them all, surrounded by their love, and could not keep from crying.

That night she sat with Alec on the porch, rocking in their chairs, and puffing on their pipes, as if she had never been away. They laughed about the day, and gossiped about the family, and Queen thanked him for all he had done for her.

… Tain't nuttin',” he said.

But it was something, she wanted to tell him, it was something of enormous importance to her, but she did not know how to say it. She realized something that shocked her. In all their years together, she had never actually told him how much

she loved him. She had always assumed that he knew, but it was thoughtless to make such an assumption. She sought for a way to tell him what was in her heart, and an odd memory burst into her mind.

“Years ago,” she said, “when I was a little girl, I lived in the big house, my pappy's house, with my half brother William. We slept in the same room, only he had a big four-poster, and I had a pallet at the foot of his bed. We'd lie in bed and dream of our futures.”

She was lost in memory.

“I always said that I was going to marry a prince on a white horse, and

William would laugh at me. ‘Who’s going to marry an itty-bitty slave girl like you, QueenT he’d say.”

She looked at Alec, and saw his gray hair, and knew that her own was at least as gray, and her face lined, and her figure full, and that they had grown old together. But that didn’t matter, because in his company she was a girl again, dreaming of the man she would marry, and he was a young ferryman, who was kind to her.

“He shouldn’t have laughed, because he was wrong. The only thing is, how could I possibly have known that when I did find my prince, he wouldn’t be on a white horse. He’d be riding on a ferryboat, across a mighty river.”

Alec nodded gently. They sat together in silence, puffing on their pipes and rocking in their chairs. Then he put out his hand to her. She reached to him, and put her hand in his, and he grasped it hard, and when he spoke, his voice was gruff with love.

“That’s all right, then,” he said.

Simon graduated from A & T College, and when World War I came, he enlisted in the U. S. Army. He was sent to France, where, in the Argonne Forest, shortly before the end of the war, he was gassed. After treatment in a hospital overseas, he was returned home and mustered out of the army.

He received his master’s degree at Cornell University, and went on to have an outstanding career as Dean of Agriculture at AM & N College, in Arkansas.

He married Bertha Palmer, and they had three sons. After Bertha’s death, Simon was married again, to Zeona Hatcher, and they had a daughter.

The grandchildren of Queen Haley by her son Simon were: George, who became a lawyer.

Julius, who became an architect.

Lois, who taught music.

And Alex Haley, who became a writer.

Afterword

Alex was often asked how much of Roots was fact and how much fiction. I have been asked the same question, and my answer is similar to his, although less emphatic.

Most of the lineage statements in this book can be documented, except the most critical one. I do not have in my possession written evidence that James Jackson, Jr., fathered Queen, and I think it is unlikely that such evidence exists. Queen believed it. Alex believed it. It was accepted, in my presence, by several of the white descendants of the Jackson family. Alex was welcomed by them as a cousin, and several of them journeyed from Alabama to his farm in Tennessee to give him a memento of The Forks of Cypress, and to welcome him, officially, into the family.

There is a major genealogical error, however, concerning the Jackson family, and to them I apologize. In all my discussions with Alex, my concern was for Queen and her direct lineage, and the early research provided to me suggested that James Jackson, Jr. (“Jass”), was the firstborn son of James and Sally Jackson. After Alex’s death, when I began work on the book, I uncovered later

research that documented the birth of an earlier son, Andrew Jackson Jackson ("A.J."). Obviously, Alex was aware of this, but none of his notes for the novel gave me any indication of how he intended to incorporate A.J: into the story. In trying to find a path through the clutter of this nineteenth-century family, and because A.J. hardly affected Queen's life, I have invented an untimely death for him. In fact, he lived to a good age.

Beyond that, almost all the people are where they should be almost all the time, although I have given a couple more years of life to Pocahontas Perkins than she actually enjoyed, and her daughter, Lizzie, is bom a tad earlier than in life.

Uncle Henry in Ireland and Uncle Hugh in Philadelphia have been combined into one character.

I doubt that young James was ever called Jass, but as he, his father, and his grandfather were all called James Jackson, I thought some clarifying nickname was necessary.

I have also been asked how much of the book was written by Alex and how much by me, and I find this impossible to quantify. I have a seven-hundred-page outline provided by Alex, boxes and boxes of his research are available to me, and some finished pages for the book, but my major resource was Alex himself. His head was full of the stories that constitute this work, and I spent two of the happiest and most informative years of my life listening to those stories and debating them with him. Some scenes we wrote together, around the kitchen table at his farm, on a banana boat to Ecuador, and during journeys of exploration to the South.

I am aware that some historians dispute some of Alex's conclusions. Given

certain constraints of time, I have done my utmost, and have employed staff, to verify his research. In the mass of reference works we have consulted, some few stand out: the several volumes of A People's History by Page Smith; Reconstruction by Eric Foner; Michael Paul Rogin's Fathers and Children, and specifically for Andrew Jackson, The Border Captain by Marquis James. The diaries of Mary Chestnut were invaluable for confin-nations of the society's attitude to relationships such as that of Jass and Easter, as were several reference works about Thomas Jefferson and his thirty-nineyear relationship with his slave mistress, Sally Hernings.

I am keenly aware that this is not the book Alex would have written. Like Roots, this was to have been a personal history of his family, and he told it to me as such. But it is not my history, my family, or my people, black or white. When Alex died, I had to move into new and unfamiliar territories. Not a historian, I had to piece this history together, and it is a period of high definition for many Americans. I am sure some will be offended by my assumptions, and to those offended I can only shrug my shoulders and say sorry.

Alex wrote the following statement about his intentions: "This book will convey visceral America. For our land of immigrants is a testimonial to the merging of the cultures of the world, and of their bloodlines."

I am not American, but for me, the overriding achievement of Roots was as a spectacular metaphor for the travails of every black family in this country and their journey through history. In that sense Queen is also a metaphor, a representative woman for the thousands upon thousands of children of the plantation who were dispossessed of their families and their heritage. I can only be grateful for this extraordinary opportunity to pass on what Alex left behind, and grieve with all my heart the circumstance that brought it about.